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AUTHOR Means, Thomas L.
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ABSTRACT

In 1980 and 1983, the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) held seminars on the teaching of business communication. In the 1980 seminar, three graduate programs were presented. These programs emphasized memorandum and report writing, visual aids, and oral presentations. The graduate programs described at the 1983 seminar were much broader, emphasizing writing letters, memorandums, and reports; oral presentations; interpersonal communication; interviewing; and organizational communication. The 1983 seminar, unlike the earlier one, also included undergraduate programs. These emphasized writing letters, memorandums, and reports; oral presentations; and logic. A survey of the literature shows that business people want colleges to teach more communications courses that will give their employees needed oral and written communication skills and that business communication educators are increasingly concerned with meeting these needs. These conclusions closely match those of an American Business Communication Association (ABCA) ad hoc committee. This match confirms that the broader 1983 seminar reflects the needs of the field. (JL)

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THE AACSB SEMINARS ON BUSINESS COMMUNICATION: THEIR CONTENT AND DISCUSSION OF THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TEACHERS

Thomas L. Means, Louisiana Tech University

ABSTRACT

In September, 1980, and in February, 1983, the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business held seminars on the teaching of business communication. In the 1980 seminar, three graduate programs were presented. The content of these programs emphasized memorandum and report writing, visual aids, and oral presentations. The content of the graduate programs presented at the 1983 AACSB seminar was much broader. Areas of communication taught in these programs were writing--letters, memorandums, and reports--oral presentations, interpersonal communication, interviewing, and organizational communication. No undergraudate programs were presented at the 1980 seminar. Undergraduate programs reviewed at the 1983 seminare emphasized writing--letters, memorandums, and reports--oral presentations, and logic. Based on Persing's ABCA ad hoc committee's findings, the content of the programs presented at the AACSB seminars better match content suggested by that committee. Thus, it seems that the AACSB is in some agreement with ABCA as to the content of a business communication course.

INTRODUCTION

In 1980 and 1983, the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business sponsored seminars on the teaching of business communication. The purpose of this paper is to discuss some of the content of two of these seminars--the seminar held in Philadelphia in 1980 and the seminar held in San Antonio in 1983. The assumption made is that the AACSB believes that the programs presented at these seminars are some of the best in the country; therefore, the content of these programs would be similar to that which the AACSB would recommend.

THE SEPTEMBER, 1980, SEMINAR

At the Phildelphia seminar, the graduate business communication program of three schools was presented: (1) The Wharton School of Business, (2) the University of Michigan, and (3) Penn State University.

Wharton's graduate business communication program is a competency based program. Areas of communication which make up the program are report writing and oral presentations. Students are required to pass both areas. They can pass these areas in one of two ways: (1) demonstrate competency in course taken or (2) demonstrate competency in a selected workshop.

The graduate communication program at the University of Michigan is composed of an elective course. The areas of communication which are presented in Michigan's program are written business communications--memorandums and long reports--and oral presentations. The main assignments of the course are (1) a persuasive memorandum, (2) impromptu writing assignments, (3) mini cases, and (4) a reflective writing assignment. The reflective writing assignment is a group project in which students are required to select a problem, develop a plan of analysis, analyze the problem, write a report based on the findings, and present their report to the class orally.

Penn State's communication program presented at the seminar was for MBA students only. This program consists mainly of a tri-semester course that meets once a week for three semesters. Areas of communication which were presented are (1) written business communications, (2) oral presentations, and (3) audio-visual aids. The first semester of the course is primarily diagnostic; the time is spent identifying weaknesses and prescribing corrective action. In the second semester, strategies for written business communication are stressed. In the last semester, complex business problems are analyzed and solutions to these problems are determined. During the last term, the faculty acts as consultants for students.

THE FEBRAURY, 1983, SEMINAR

At the San Antónió seminar, sessions were held on curriculum content for undergraduate and graduate programs. Other sessions on (1) how to initiate a program, (2) program administration, (3) using technology to teach communication skills, and (4) titles, tenure, and staffing were presented.

Though several programs of selected schools were presented, a notebook containing descriptions of eight undergraudate programs and nine graduate programs was given to those attending the seminar.

Based on the descriptions of undergraduate programs, some findings are

(1) Subjects which seem to receive the main emphasis of the programs are written communication and oral reports. However, one presenter indicated that if his program had one more course, he would make it a course in logic.

(2) Written communication receives the main emphasis in these programs.

(3) The types of written communication taught in these courses is primarily letters, memorandums, and report writing.

Findings based on the descriptions of the graduate programs are

(1) Areas of communication taught are writing, oral presentations, interpersonal communication, interviewing, and organizational communication.

(2) Types of written communication taught include letters, memorandums, and reports.

(3) Oral presentations included case presentations, extemporaneous presentations, and speaking in hostile situations.

WHAT BUSINESS PEOPLE ARE SAYING

After surveying the literature, it is evident that increase attention is being given to communication as an integral part of a business organization. As the result, business people want colleges to teach more communication courses so their employees will have the needed communication skills.

Communication effectiveness is now being viewed as a key element in improving productivity. Several authors have stressed the importance of the communication link to productivity [1, p. 16; 12, p. 12; 17, p. 25; 21, p. 37; and 33, p. 10]. The opinion that better communication will bring about better productivity is summarized in the following quote by W. H. Weiss:

> More and more evidence is accumulating that good communications are the key to good productivity. . . .Human efforts thrive on communication which provides motivation, promotes cooperation, and maintains interest [33, p. 10].

Because the values of employees are changing, increased attention is given to communication within the organization. Many want more from their jobs than money and security. Thus, there is a greater communication challenge facing managers. In the past, the manager's role was to make sure that people understood what was expected of them in their job performance. Today's employee is looking for reassurance that he is valued by his employer as a human being instead of being thought of as merely a "hand" in the department to get the work out [32, pp. 10-11].

Organizations also have to consider a variety of demands from outside the organization. Government legislation and public-interest groups are having a say in the organization. This situation is forcing organizations to re-think their communications priorities.

Corporate credibility now depends on effective corporate communication with the outside world. Business has to make its objectives known to government and to the public. Getting involved in the job of public communication will become common place for everyone in an organization--not just the board of directors [22, p. 17]. One business executive summed up this external imperative by stating, "Doing your job and letting the public relations department handle external communications is no longer adequate" [22, p.17].

The results of "The Endicott Report" of 1981 represented the opinions of 142 well-known business and industrial organizations. Representatives of these organizations were asked "What can college students do to make themselves more employable in your company?" One of the major responses from a consensus of 125 companies was, "Develop communication skills--oral and written" [9, p. 7]. The representatives were also asked the following question: "What can colleges do to make graduates more employable?" The consensus response for the companies indicated, "Offer more courses in commmunication--speaking and writing" [9, p. 7].

WHAT BUSINESS PEOPLE AND EDUCATORS ARE SAYING TOGETHER

Business people and educators have cited several specific subject areas that need emphasis in the basic communication course. Organizations are depending upon effective communication to increase productivity, improve worker satisfaction, and gain credibility with public-interest groups. Interpersonal communication skills are viewed as the "crucial" communication ability needed by business employees [1, pp. 9-10; 2, p. 62; 4, p. 181; 6, p. 38; 10, p. 10; 7, p. 34; 19, p. 13; 20, p. 8; 22, pp. 14-15; 26, p. 54; 29, p. 14; 31, pp. 13-14; and 32, p. 17].

Many business people now share Riesman's philosophy of the importance of improving interpersonal relationships. His belief is

> In organizations, as well as in society in general, our problems are people problems--interpersonal relationships--rather than the material conditions of life and the concrete machinery of organizations [27, pp. 127-128].

Human resource development, the drive for communication efficiency, increased use of small groups, and the need for improved listening were specific areas of interpersonal communication which business people and educators cited as needing improvement.

The current emphasis on human resource development creates a need for improved interpersonal skills. Human resource development is defined as "developing human potential so that individual and organizational goals can be simultaneously fulfilled" [3, p.7]. Interpersonal

communication skills are seen as the vehicle through which human potential can be developed [7, p. 34.].

There is a general awakening to the importance of strong face-to-face communication skills that will allow co-workers to communicate effectively. Carl Rogers has stated, "There will be the development of a whole new style of communication. . . .We seem to be aiming for a new reality in relationships, a new openness in communication" [28, p. 124.].

Some business people and educators believe that this drive for a new style of communication will mean that demand on verbal skills will outpace the demand for good writing [4, p. 181; 6, p. 38; and 22, pp. 14-15]. In an effort to reduce the current information-glut problem, a proposed solution is to "keep things oral." Ralph G. Nichols stated that printed documents will probably always be needed, but there is a definite trend toward an oral-aural culture [4, p. 181].

More and more organizations are using the "team" approach to decision making [5, p. 23; 8, p. 62; 23, p. 6; 24, p. 4; and 18, p. 26]. Some firms are even implementing the matrix structure in order to more fully utilize the knowledge of specialists and coordinate company efforts on a given project [11, p. 40]. The matrix organization brings together specialists from divergent fields to work in temporary or, perhaps, permanent work groups.

Thus, the group meeting is becoming a more frequently used communication setting. Formal, restrictive channels of communication are giving way to open, face-to-face exchanges. The increasing use of groups means that organizations will be seeking employees who have effective interpersonal skills.

Both business people and educators have stated that one particular interpersonal skill that needs improving is listening [1, p. 33; 7, p.34; 32, p. 21; and 33, p. 2]. Since business communication is depending more and more on the spoken word rather than the written word, effective listening is a vital skill. It has been stated that poor listening ability is probably the single most devasting factor in the communication breakdown [32, p. 2]. A study of 100 industrial firms was performed in order to determine the typical listening efficiency in organizations. The results indicated that if a message is passed down through five levels of authority, 20 percent of the original message will reach its ultimate receiver [4, pp. 188-189]. As the result, some businesses have started in-service programs in an effort to up-grade the listening skills of their employees.

WHAT EDUCATORS ARE SAYING

Educators are becoming more aware of changes in the business world and the needs of today's students. Some of the research done regarding the adequacy of the business communication curriculum has

resulted in the recommendation of a broader base for that curriculum [13, p. 49; 14, p. 347; 15, p. 26; 16, p. 26; 30, p. 41].

For example, the results of an ABCA ad hoc committee research project are representative of conclusions found by others. This ABCA committee performed a three-year study to determine student evaluations of the basic communication course. The results of this survey led to the following:

> The course time spent on letter writing and long report writing should be decreased; time spent on inter-office memorandums, platform speaking, interpersonal or small-group communication, interviewing, listening, non-verbal communication, barriers to communication, and psychology of communication should be increased; and the time spent on short report writing, dictating business messages, job applications, communication theory, and semantics, and "other" topics should be maintained [25, p. 21].

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Business people have indicated that they feel that the communication skills of their employees are "critical" to the success. Educators and business people feel that effectively written business communication is important. However, they have indicated that small group communication, listening, and face-to-face communication--interpersonal communication--will be essential for future employees and are increasing in importance. Such feelings seem to generally concur with research completed by an ad hoc committee of ABCA.

The AACSB seems to be in general agreement with what business people and educators are saying about the communication needs of employees. Thus, the curricula presented at the 1983 seminar was much broader in scope on the types of communication skills taught in the programs presented than was the scope of the programs presented at the 1980 seminar.

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